(b) the number of Passport Offices which are fully computerised;

(c) whether Bangalore Passport Office has been fully computerised and streamlined;

(d) if not, the steps proposed to be taken to fully computerise the Bangalore Passport Office; and

(e) the number of Passport Offices which have started the on-line passport information system in the country?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) 28 Passport Offices are functioning in the country.

(b) 25 Passport Offices are computerised.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) 14 Passport Offices have websites which provide online information on the passport issue procedure and allow for status check of passport applications.

Decentralised system of food procurement

*76. DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) the progress made thus far in implementing the new decentralised system of food procurement;

(b) the advantages likely to accrue from the new system as against the FCI based centralised system of procurement; and

(c) the State Governments' reaction to the new system?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHANTA KUMAR): (a) Decentralised system of procurement of foodgrains is in operation in three States at present. These States are Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

(b) Decentralised system of procurement has the following advantages:—

(i) Local farmers would get the Minimum Support Price.

(ii) Dependence of State Government on the Food Corporation of India (FCI) for PDS supplies would be reduced.

(iii) Higher local procurement would reduce pressure on freight movement by rail.

(iv) Locally grown varieties, which are preferred by local consumers, will be available through the Public Distribution Network.

(v) Since the consuming States themselves will the procurring foodgrains, there would be no complaints about quality.

(vi) The economic cost of foodgrains to be procured by States would normally be less than the economic cost of the FCI.

Decentralised system of procurement would, thus help the producers as well as the consumers, besides the country as a whole.

(c) Decentralisation of procurement and distribution was one of the items included in the Agenda for the Conference of Chief Minister on WTO Agreement on Agriculture and Food Management held at New Delhi on 21.5.2001. There was no consensus on the issue. A Committee comprising some Union Ministers and Chief Ministers, besides Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, has been constituted to look into, *inter-alia*, enhancing the efficiency of procurement and reducing the cost of distribution of foodgrains under PDS through decentralisation and the active involvement of the States. The first meeting of the Committee was held on 6.7.2001.

Review of food procurement policy

*77. SHRI RUMANDLA RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Planning Commission has suggested a review of the food procurement policy as surplus production of foodgrains has not helped in eradicating hunger;

(b) if so, whether the food procurement policy has become a vehicle for supporting high prices of foodgrains;

(c) whether a conference "Towards Hunger Free India" organized jointly by the Planning Commission, World Food Programme and MS Swaminathan Research Foundation was held in the month of April, 2001;